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SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS
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A TALE OF THE UN-MEN™
dave louapre
vince locke
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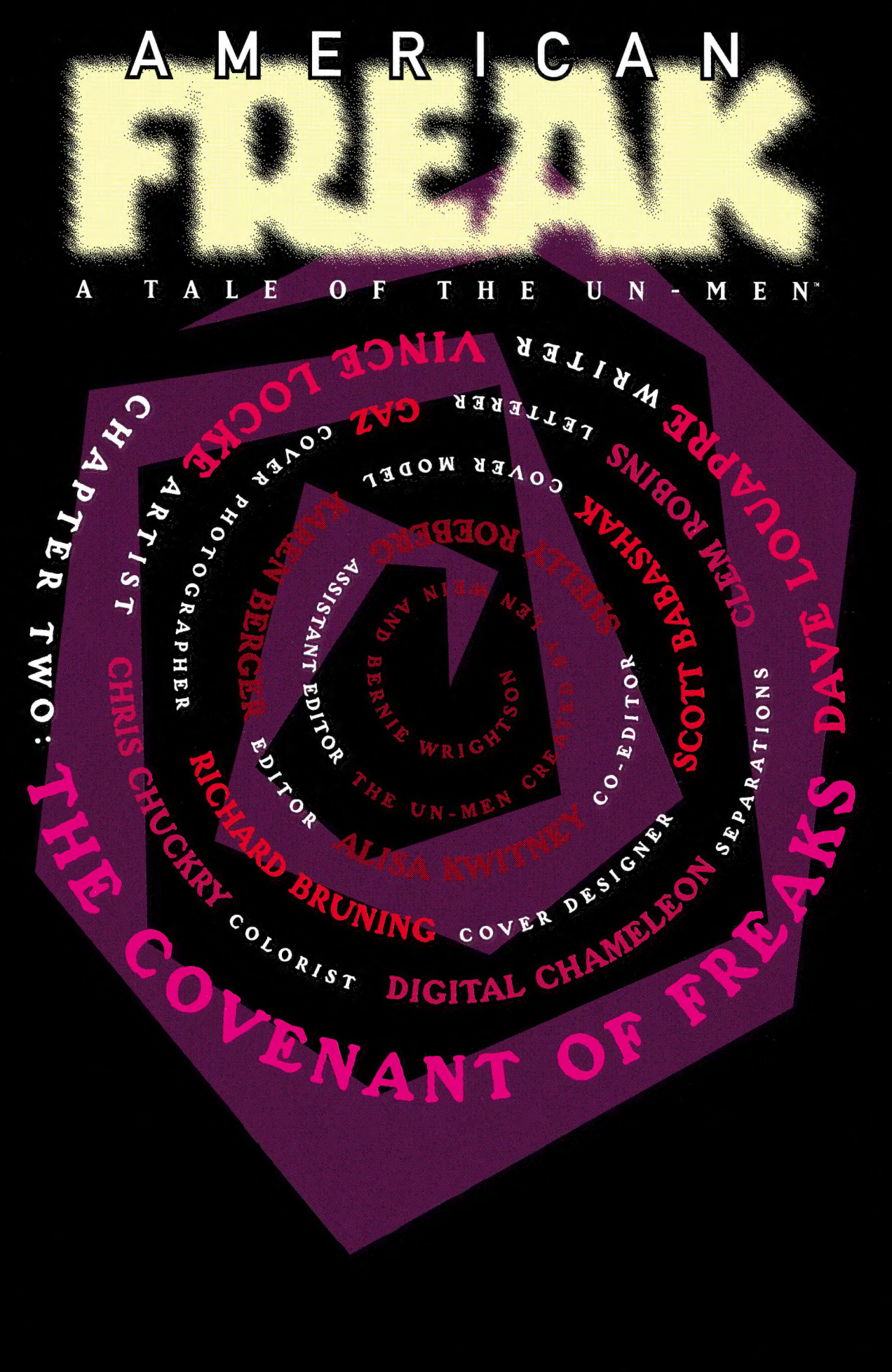
childhood
GAZ AND BRUNING


AMERICAN FREAK
A TALE OF THE UN-MEN™
VINCE LOCKE WRITER
CAZ LETTERER
CHAPTER TWO: THE COVENANT OF FREAKS
ARTIST VINCE LOCKE
COVER PHOTOGRAPHER CAZ
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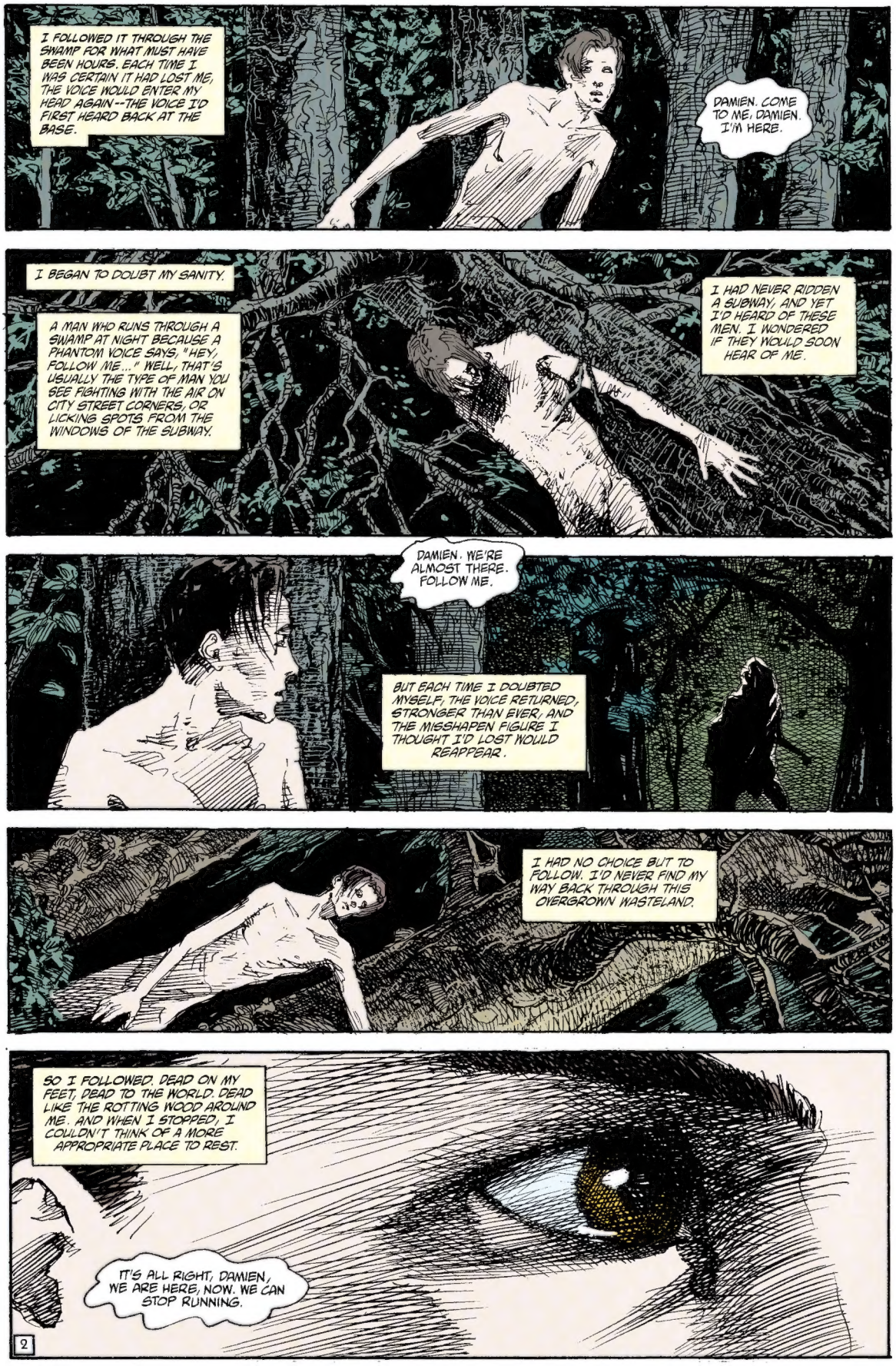
DAVE LOUAPRE SEPARATIONS
THE UN-MEN CREATED BY KEN WEIN AND BERNIE WRIGHTSON

THERE IS A TERROR THAT LURKS DEEP IN MY SOUL. I CAN FEEL IT WITH EVERY BEAT OF MY HEART.
A RESTLESS FEAR THAT SOME DAY MY SOUL WILL CEASE TO EXIST, ALONG WITH MY BODY AND MIND.
IT'S A TERROR NOT PACIFIED BY RELIGION, NOT COMFORTED BY PHILOSOPHY, OR FAITH.
BUT IT'S MORE THAN A SIMPLE FEAR OF DEATH,
FOR DEATH, IN ALL ITS HORROR, AT LEAST BRINGS PEACE.
NO, THIS TERROR IS ROOTED IN THE LOSS OF CONTROL--OF MY MIND, MY BODY, AND MY SOUL.
AND AS I CHASED AFTER THIS THING IN THE SWAMP, I REALIZED THAT VERY TERROR HAD SEIZED CONTROL OF MY HEART. BUT IT WASN'T THE FEAR OF DYING THAT MADE MY HEART POUND...
IT WAS THE SUDDEN FEAR OF LIVING--THE UNSETTLING IDEA THAT I MIGHT ACTUALLY CATCH UP TO THIS THING I HAD CHASED SO FAR INTO THE NIGHT.


I FOLLOWED IT THROUGH THE SWAMP FOR WHAT MUST HAVE BEEN HOURS. EACH TIME I WAS CERTAIN IT HAD LOST ME, THE VOICE WOULD ENTER MY HEAD AGAIN--THE VOICE I'D FIRST HEARD BACK AT THE BASE.
DAMIEN. COME TO ME, DAMIEN. I'M HERE.
I BEGAN TO DOUBT MY SANITY.
A MAN WHO RUNS THROUGH A SWAMP AT NIGHT BECAUSE A PHANTOM VOICE SAYS, "HEY, FOLLOW ME..." WELL, THAT'S USUALLY THE TYPE OF MAN YOU SEE FIGHTING WITH THE AIR ON CITY STREET CORNERS, OR LICKING SPOTS FROM THE WINDOWS OF THE SUBWAY.
I HAD NEVER RIDDEN A SUBWAY, AND YET I'D HEARD OF THESE MEN. I WONDERED IF THEY WOULD SOON HEAR OF ME.
DAMIEN. WE'RE ALMOST THERE. FOLLOW ME.
BUT EACH TIME I DOUBTED MYSELF, THE VOICE RETURNED, STRONGER THAN EVER, AND THE MISSHAPEN FIGURE I THOUGHT I'D LOST WOULD REAPPEAR.
I HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO FOLLOW. I'D NEVER FIND MY WAY BACK THROUGH THIS OVERGROWN WASTELAND.
SO I FOLLOWED. DEAD ON MY FEET, DEAD TO THE WORLD. DEAD LIKE THE ROTTING WOOD AROUND ME. AND WHEN I STOPPED, I COULDN'T THINK OF A MORE APPROPRIATE PLACE TO REST.
IT'S ALL RIGHT, DAMIEN, WE ARE HERE, NOW. WE CAN STOP RUNNING.
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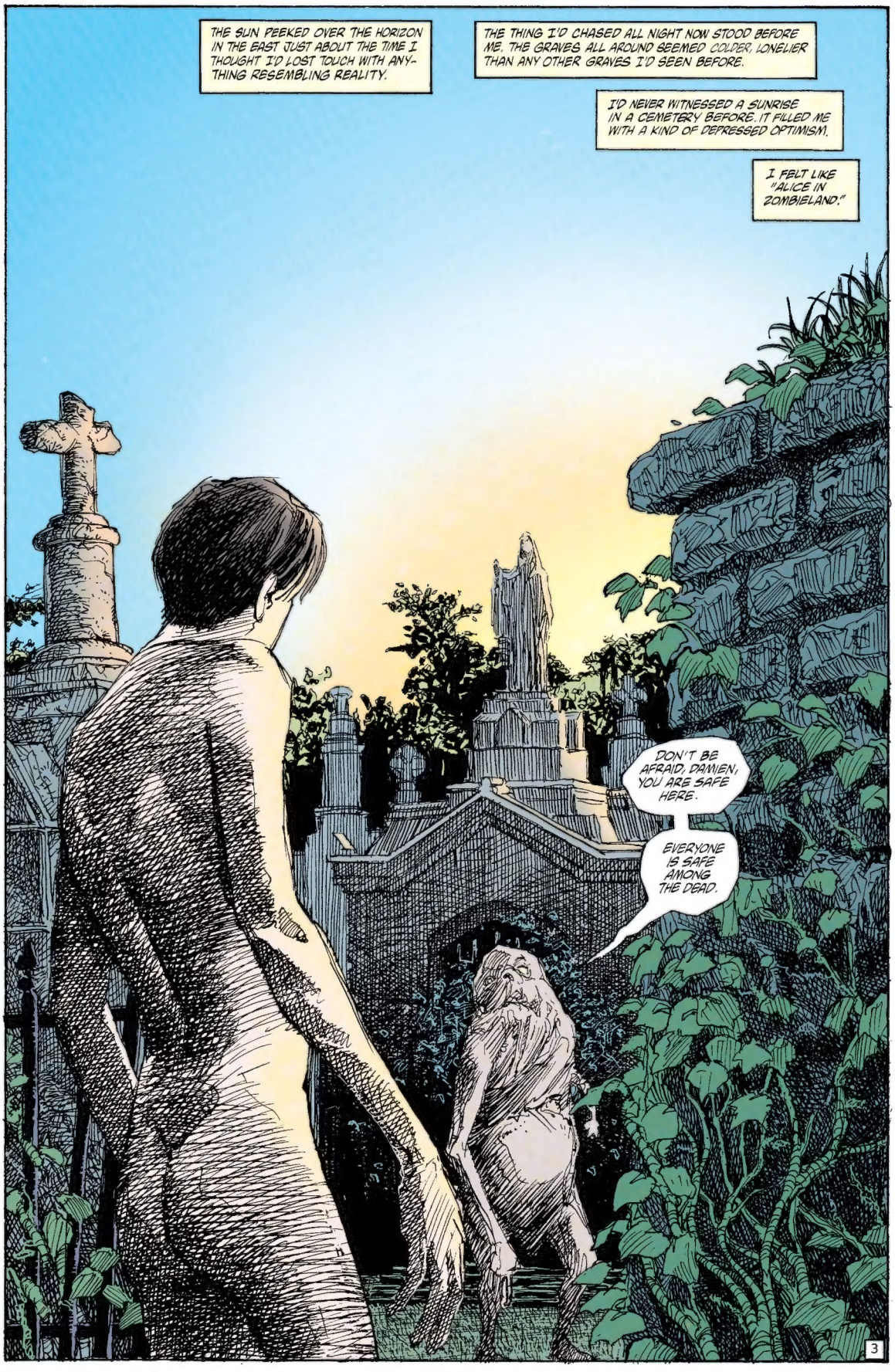
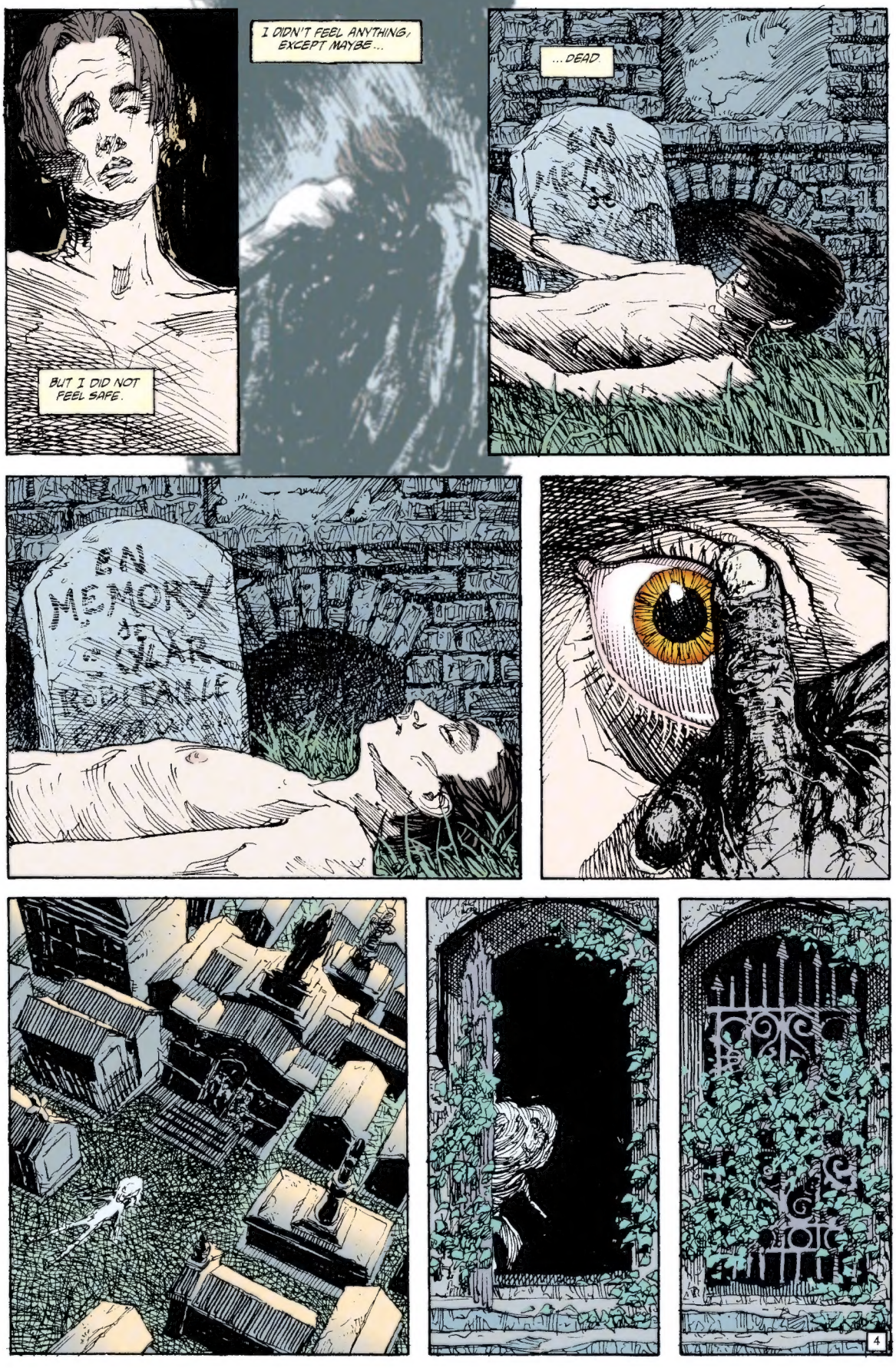

THE SUN PEEKED OVER THE HORIZON IN THE EAST JUST ABOUT THE TIME I THOUGHT I'D LOST TOUCH WITH ANYTHING RESEMBLING REALITY.
THE THING I'D CHASED ALL NIGHT NOW STOOD BEFORE ME. THE GRAVES ALL AROUND SEEMED COLDER, LONELIER THAN ANY OTHER GRAVES I'D SEEN BEFORE.
I'D NEVER WITNESSED A SUNRISE IN A CEMETERY BEFORE. IT FILLED ME WITH A KIND OF DEPRESSED OPTIMISM.
I FELT LIKE "ALICE IN ZOMBIELAND."
DON'T BE AFRAID, DAMIEN, YOU ARE SAFE HERE.
EVERYONE IS SAFE AMONG THE DEAD.


I DIDN'T FEEL ANYTHING, EXCEPT MAYBE...
BUT I DID NOT FEEL SAFE.
...DEAD.
IN MEMORY OF
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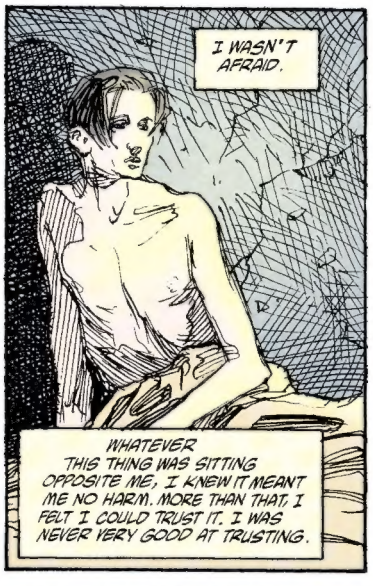
KANE COULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN TOO FAR. THAT SWAMP IS LIKE A LABYRINTH.
I'VE DISPATCHED THREE UNITS TO FIND HIM.
THE MEN HAVE BEEN INSTRUCTED TO RETURN KANE TO THE BASE, WHERE HE'LL REMAIN UNDER HOUSE ARREST UNTIL FURTHER ORDERS ARE GIVEN.
IF HE RESISTS CAPTURE, THE TEAM LEADERS MAY USE WHATEVER MEANS NECESSARY TO SUBDUE HIM. COLONEL GRAY'S ORDERS.
MAJOR LAWRENCE, DAMIEN KANE IS A VERY SICK MAN. HIS METABOLISM IS UNDERGOING A TRAUMATIC CHANGE. ANY UNDUE STRESS COULD CAUSE IRREPARABLE DAMAGE.
I HAVE MY ORDERS, DOCTOR, AND UNTIL MR KANE IS FOUND, I'M AFRAID YOU'RE CONFINED TO THIS BASE. THE ARMY CONSIDERS THIS A VERY DELICATE MATTER.
ANY INTERFERENCE WILL BE DEALT WITH HARSHLY THAT IS ALL.
HE'LL DIE OUT THERE.
OR WORSE...
...THEY'LL KILL HIM.

DAMIEN. OPEN YOUR EYES. IT IS SAFE, NOW.
THE VOICE WAS IN MY HEAD AGAIN, BUT AS I OPENED MY EYES I REALIZED THAT IT SPOKE IN PERFECT SYNC WITH THE PAIR OF RANCID LIPS BEFORE ME.
WAKE UP, DAMIEN, I HAVE MUCH TO TELL YOU, AND WE HAVE LITTLE TIME TO WASTE.
THE FACE I AWOKE TO WAS STRAIGHT OUT OF A HORROR MOVIE. THE FACE OF A MONSTER. THE FACE OF EVERYTHING UGLY.
WHO ARE YOU? WHERE AM I?
MY NAME IS CRASSUS, AND THIS IS MY HOME. NOT MUCH TO SPEAK OF, REALLY, BUT THEN I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A...MAN OF MODEST MEANS.
I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU FOR A VERY LONG TIME, DAMIEN. DON'T BE FRIGHTENED. I WANT TO HELP YOU.
YOU'RE ONE OF THOSE...THINGS. THE THINGS I SAW IN THE TANKS BACK AT THE BASE.
YES, I GUESS I AM ONE OF THOSE THINGS.
AND I WANT TO HELP YOU KEEP FROM BECOMING ONE AS WELL.

FROM WHAT I COULD GATHER, CRASSUS, LIKE THE CREATURES I SAW AT THE BASE, WAS CREATED BY A MAN NAMED ARCANE.
WHEN THE OTHERS WERE CAPTURED, CRASSUS HAD SOMEHOW ESCAPED.

I WATCHED HIM FOR A VERY LONG TIME. HE WAS PLAYING WITH AN OLD PAIR OF DICE, ROLLING THEM AGAIN AND AGAIN FOR NO APPARENT REASON.

THERE WAS A SADNESS IN HIS EYES THAT EVERY SO OFTEN MADE ME FORGET JUST HOW UGLY HE WAS.
I FELT LIKE I'D BECOME ENTANGLED IN A BIG, SLOW NIGHT-MARE. ONLY...

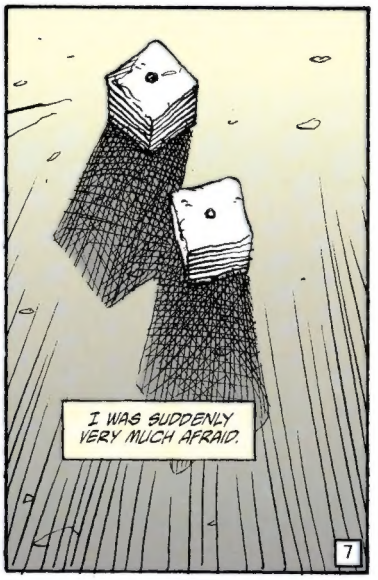

I WASN'T AFRAID.
WHATEVER THIS THING WAS SITTING OPPOSITE ME, I KNEW IT MEANT ME NO HARM. MORE THAN THAT, I FELT I COULD TRUST IT. I WAS NEVER VERY GOOD AT TRUSTING.

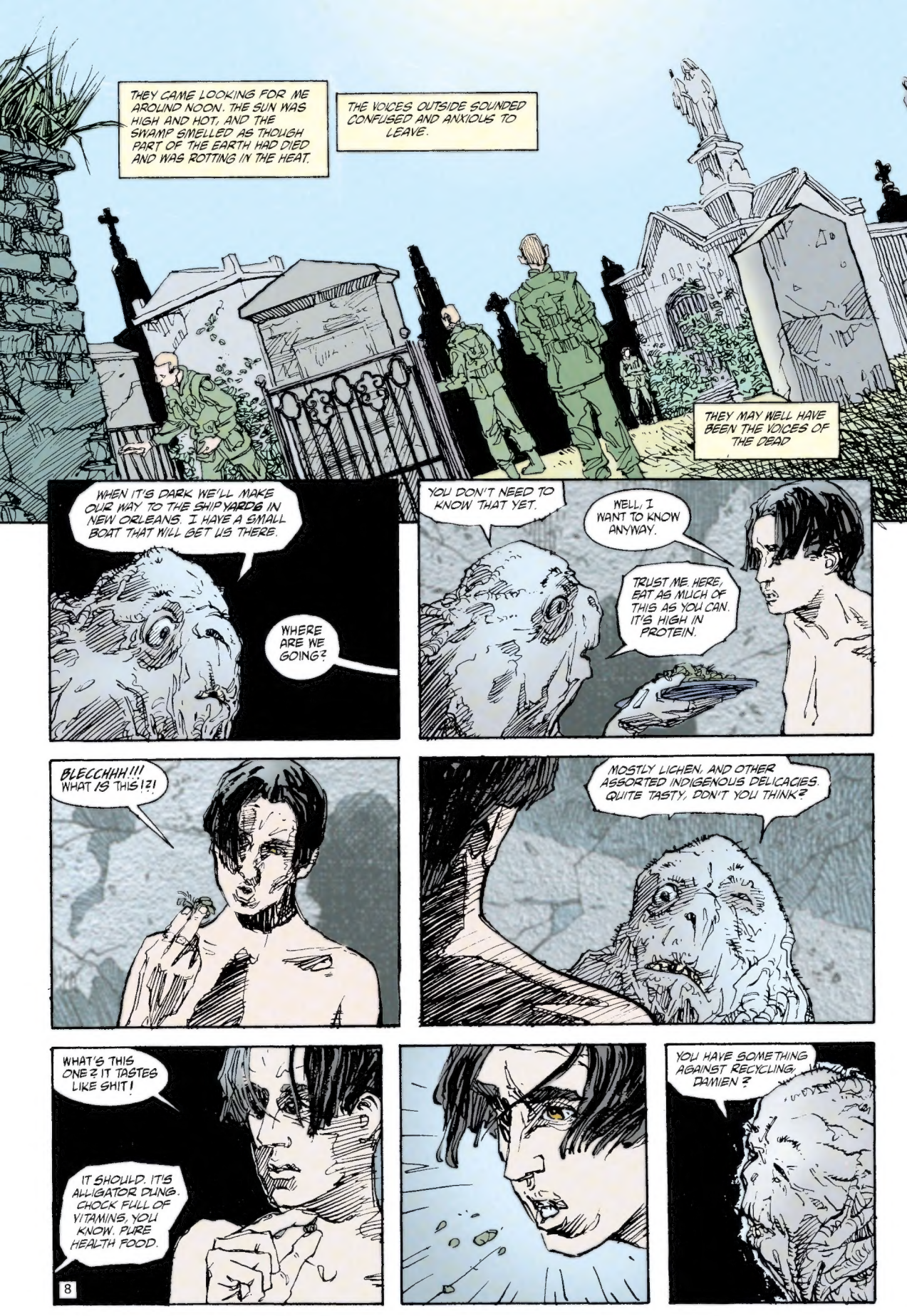
BUT THIS WAS DIFFERENT. THIS WAS A TRUST BORN OF NECESSITY.
AN UNAVOIDABLE KINSHIP THAT BONDS THOSE WHO'VE SUFFERED AT THE HANDS OF OTHERS.

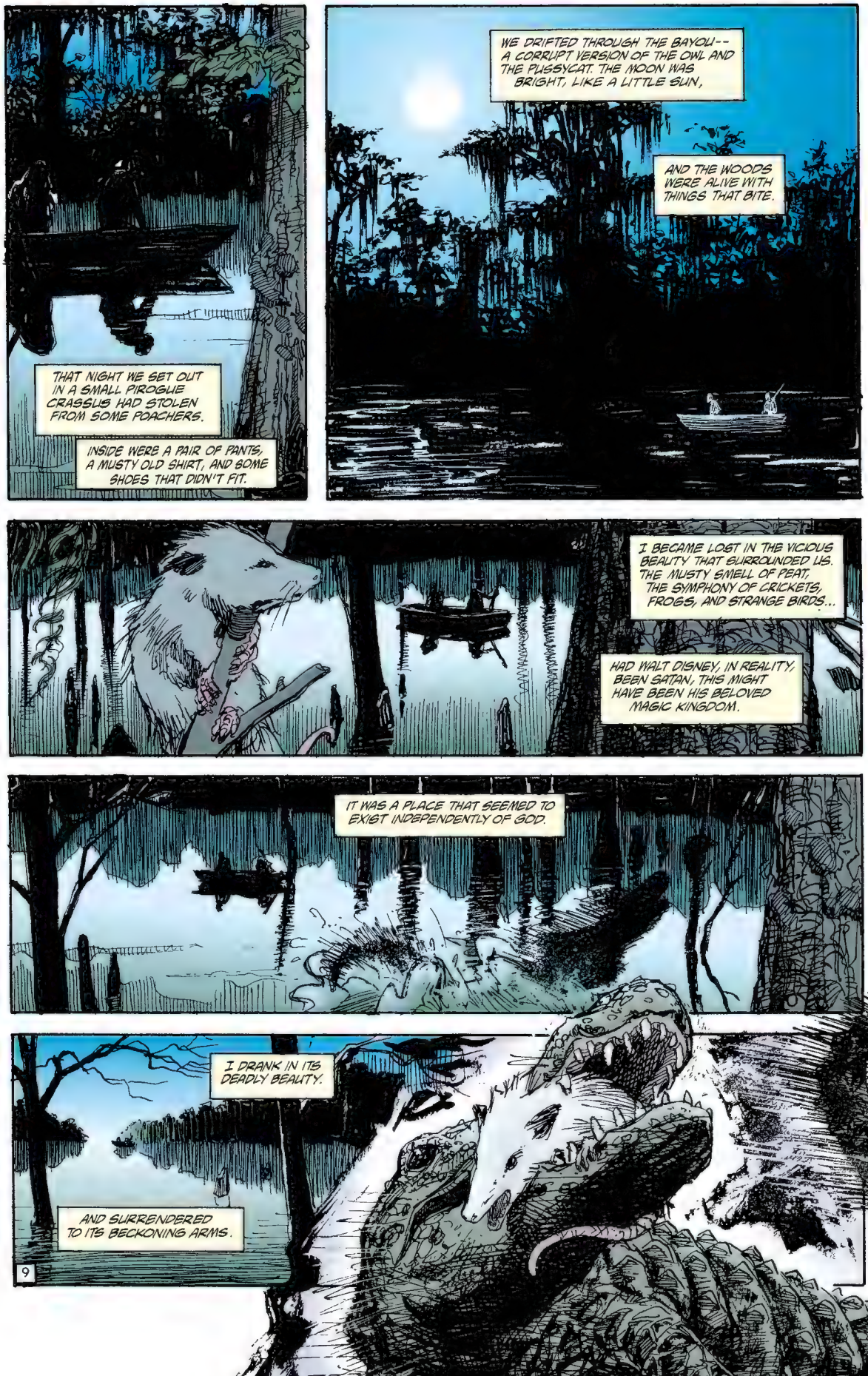
THEY SAY THAT THE EYES ARE THE WINDOWS TO THE SOUL.
BUT WHEN I LOOKED CRASSUS IN THE EYES, ALL I SAW WAS AN EMPTY SPACE OBSCURED BY MISERY AND ANGER. A SOUL WHOSE WINDOWS HAD LONG SINCE BEEN BOARDED UP.

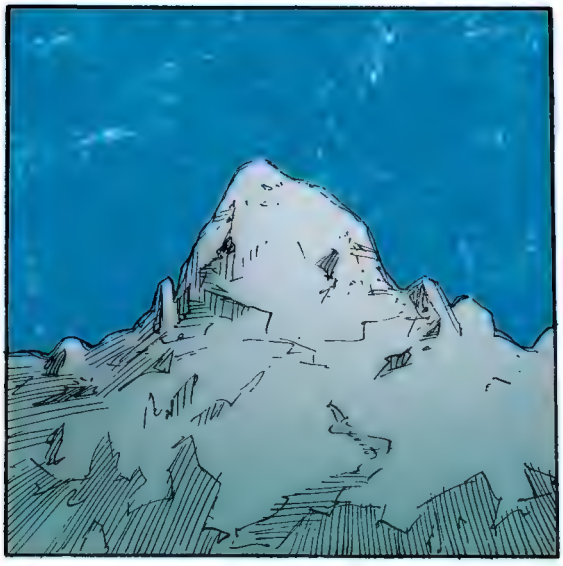
IT WAS IN THOSE EYES THAT I CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF MY FUTURE, AND MY PAST.

AND ALTHOUGH I TOOK COMFORT IN THIS NEWFOUND TRUST...


I WAS SUDDENLY VERY MUCH AFRAID.


THEY CAME LOOKING FOR ME AROUND NOON. THE SUN WAS HIGH AND HOT, AND THE SWAMP SMELLED AS THOUGH PART OF THE EARTH HAD DIED AND WAS ROTTING IN THE HEAT.
THE VOICES OUTSIDE SOUNDED CONFUSED AND ANXIOUS TO LEAVE.
THEY MAY WELL HAVE BEEN THE VOICES OF THE DEAD
WHEN IT'S DARK WE'LL MAKE OUR WAY TO THE SHIPYARDS IN NEW ORLEANS. I HAVE A SMALL BOAT THAT WILL GET US THERE.
WHERE ARE WE GOING?
YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOW THAT YET.
WELL, I WANT TO KNOW ANYWAY.
TRUST ME HERE, EAT AS MUCH OF THIS AS YOU CAN. IT'S HIGH IN PROTEIN.
BLECCHHH!!! WHAT IS THIS?!
MOSTLY LICHEN, AND OTHER ASSORTED INDIGENOUS DELICACIES. QUITE TASTY, DON'T YOU THINK?
WHAT'S THIS ONE? IT TASTES LIKE SHIT!
IT SHOULD. IT'S ALLIGATOR DUNG. CHOCK FULL OF VITAMINS, YOU KNOW. PURE HEALTH FOOD.
YOU HAVE SOMETHING AGAINST RECYCLING, DAMIEN?

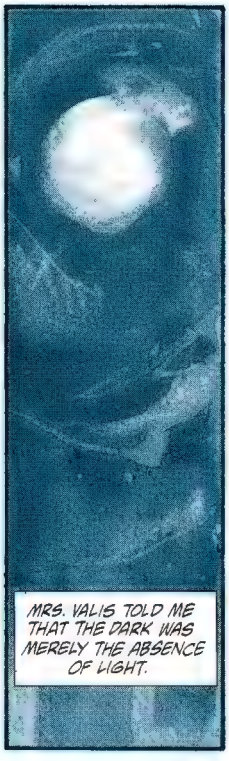

THAT NIGHT WE SET OUT IN A SMALL PIROGUE CRASSUS HAD STOLEN FROM SOME POACHERS.
INSIDE WERE A PAIR OF PANTS, A MUSTY OLD SHIRT, AND SOME SHOES THAT DIDN'T FIT.
WE DRIFTED THROUGH THE BAYOU-- A CORRUPT VERSION OF THE OWL AND THE PUSSYCAT. THE MOON WAS BRIGHT, LIKE A LITTLE SUN,
AND THE WOODS WERE ALIVE WITH THINGS THAT BITE.
I BECAME LOST IN THE VICIOUS BEAUTY THAT SURROUNDED US. THE MUSTY SMELL OF PEAT, THE SYMPHONY OF CRICKETS, FROGS, AND STRANGE BIRDS...
HAD WALT DISNEY, IN REALITY, BEEN SATAN, THIS MIGHT HAVE BEEN HIS BELOVED MAGIC KINGDOM.
IT WAS A PLACE THAT SEEMED TO EXIST INDEPENDENTLY OF GOD.
I DRANK IN ITS DEADLY BEAUTY.
AND SURRENDERED TO ITS BECKONING ARMS.

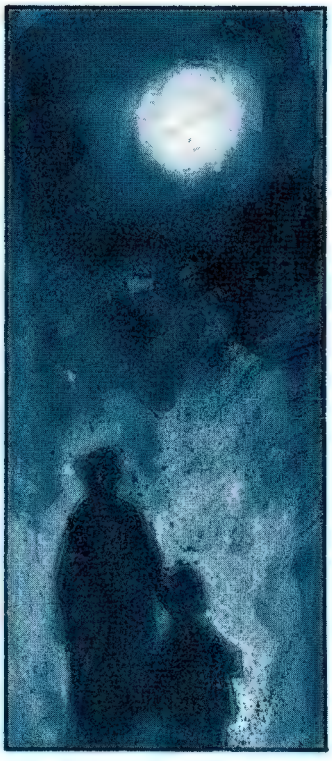


WHEN I WAS A CHILD, I ASKED THE WOMAN WHO TOOK CARE OF ME TO EXPLAIN THE DARKNESS.

WHAT MADE THE DARKNESS BLACK? WHAT WAS THE THING THAT CAME IN THE NIGHT AND MADE YOU UNABLE TO SEE?
WAS IT SOMETHING LIKE PAINT, THAT COVERED THE TREES, OR AN ANIMAL, PERHAPS, THAT LIVED IN THE SKY AND ONLY CAME OUT WHEN THE LIGHT WAS AWAY?

"WHAT IS THE DARK?" I ASKED HER. "WHO MADE IT, AND WHY?"


MRS. VALIS TOLD ME THAT THE DARK WAS MERELY THE ABSENCE OF LIGHT.



SHE WAS A NICE LADY WHO PUT PLASTIC COVERS ON THE FURNITURE AND BELIEVED IN GOD.
SHE TOOK ME TO CHURCH EVERY SUNDAY AND GAVE ME QUARTERS TO DROP IN THE COLLECTION PLATE.

I THOUGHT IT STRANGE THAT GOD NEEDED HANDOUTS WHEN, SUPPOSEDLY, HE MADE THE WHOLE UNIVERSE. WHAT DID HE WANT TO BUY?

MRS. VALIS SAID THE MONEY WAS TO BUY FLOWERS FOR THE CHURCH. "FLOWERS ARE A SYMBOL OF LIFE," SHE SAID. "A SIGN OF ALL THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS GOD HAS GIVEN US."
BUT EVERY TIME I LOOKED AT THE FLOWERS, THEY SEEMED TO BE WAITING TO DIE.

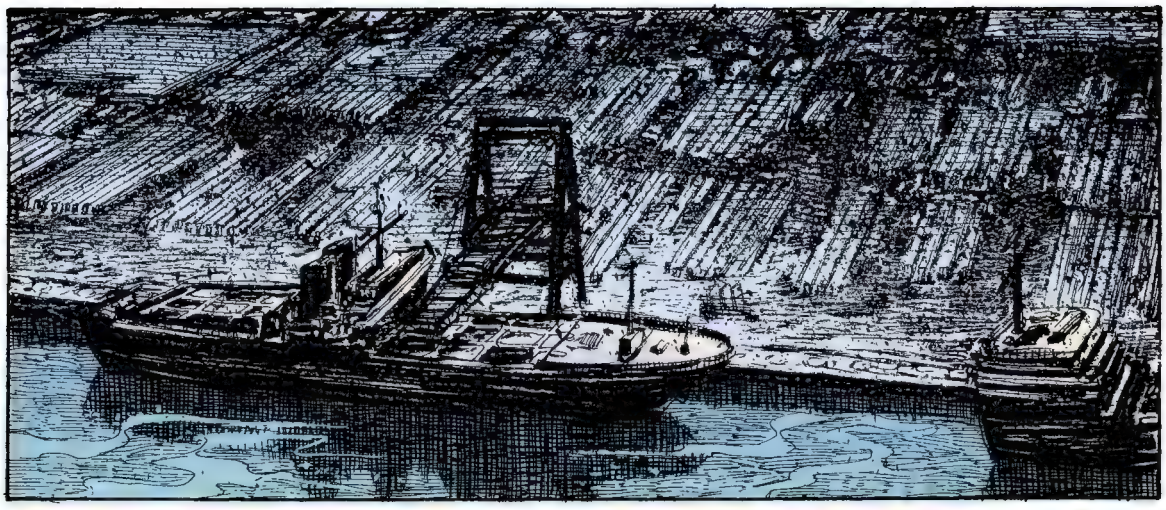
FLOWERS NEED LOTS OF LIGHT, AND THE CHURCH WAS A VERY DARK PLACE.

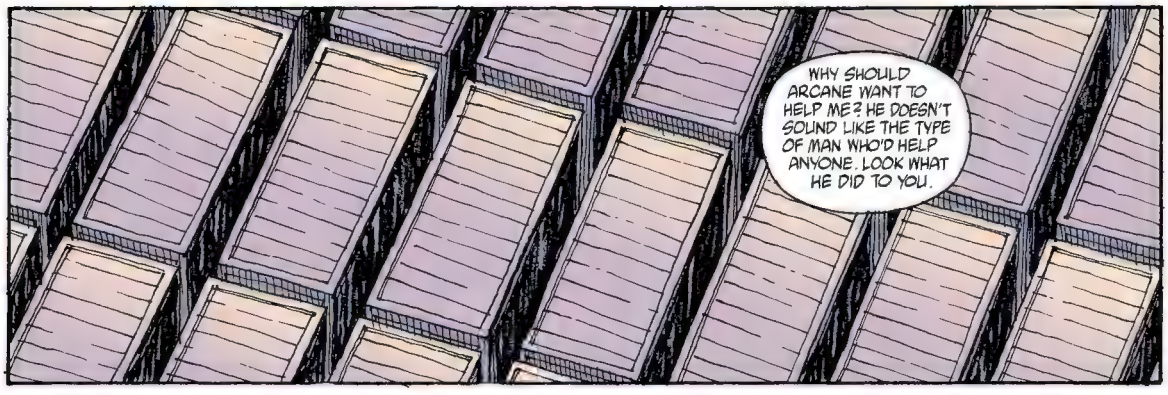
THE LIGHT THAT CAME THROUGH THE STAINED GLASS WINDOW WASN'T ENOUGH TO SAVE THEM. TO ME, IT WAS SAD LIGHT...

LIGHT THAT HAD LOST ITS HEALING SPIRIT WHEN IT FILTERED THROUGH THE GLOOMY RED AND BLUE PICTURES.

MRS. VALIS DIED WHEN I WAS TWELVE, AND I WAS PLACED IN THE CARE OF MISS STAFFORD.
I DON'T KNOW IF MISS STAFFORD BELIEVED IN GOD OR NOT, BUT SHE NEVER WENT TO CHURCH, AND SHE REMOVED THE PLASTIC COVERS FROM THE FURNITURE.
I ASKED HER ABOUT THE DARK AS WELL, BUT SHE SAID SHE DIDN'T KNOW.
"THERE IS LIGHT AND THERE IS DARK, DAMIEN," SHE TOLD ME. "JUST DEAL WITH IT!"
I'VE SINCE COME TO KNOW THAT THERE ARE MANY KINDS OF DARKNESS, EACH WITH A SECRET LIFE OF ITS OWN.
THEY FUNCTION LIKE WHIRLPOOLS, DRAWING YOU INTO THEIR CENTER...
...UNTIL YOU ARE TOO FAR GONE TO BE SAVED.

CRASSUS HAD BEEN CREATED IN A DARKNESS ALL HIS OWN. BUT IT WAS A DARKNESS HE ACCEPTED, IF FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN THERE WAS LITTLE HE COULD DO ABOUT IT.
WE WERE ON OUR WAY TO FIND HIS CREATOR--THE MAN CALLED ARCANE. HE LIVED SOMEWHERE IN ROMANIA, WHERE CRASSUS HAD BEEN BORN.
CRASSUS HAD MADE THE TRIP BEFORE, AND HE CLAIMED THIS MAN ARCANE KNEW MORE ABOUT WHAT WAS HAPPENING TO ME THAN MANGUY WOULD EVER KNOW.
THE WHOLE THING SEEMED INSANE. I FELT LIKE HUCKLEBERRY FINN STEALING OFF IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT TO "LIGHT OUT FOR THE TERRITORIES."
BUT WHATEVER EXCITEMENT I FELT WAS QUICKLY REPLACED BY FEAR. I WAS RUNNING FOR MY LIFE, AND I HAD NO IDEA WHERE I WAS HEADED.
WE WERE GOING TO ROMANIA, AND I HONESTLY COULDN'T THINK OF ANY REASON NOT TO. IT MADE NO SENSE TO ME.
BUT THEN, NOTHING ABOUT THE LAST FORTY-EIGHT HOURS HAD MADE MUCH SENSE, EITHER.
AND MY BRAIN EXPLODED WITH A CONFUSION THAT MADE CHAOS SEEM ORDERLY BY COMPARISON.




WHY SHOULD ARCANE WANT TO HELP ME? HE DOESN'T SOUND LIKE THE TYPE OF MAN WHO'D HELP ANYONE. LOOK WHAT HE DID TO YOU.

ARCANE IS NO SAMARITAN. HE BROUGHT ME AND OTHERS LIKE MYSELF INTO THIS WORLD SIMPLY TO DO HIS BIDDING. THEN HE ABANDONED US.

BUT HE MIGHT SEE HIS WAY TO HELPING YOU, DAMIEN ...TO HELPING US... IF PROPERLY PERSUADED.

I DON'T KNOW. DR. MANGUY IS WORKING ON A DRUG TO STABILIZE THE REGRESSION. IF I GO BACK, MAYBE THERE'S A CHANCE...

IF YOU GO BACK, YOU'LL DIE. THEY'LL LOCK YOU IN A CAGE AND WATCH YOU MUTATE!
YOU'LL BE A GLORIFIED SCIENCE PROJECT, DAMIEN. USED TO OBTAIN GOVERNMENT GRANTS AND GARNISH NOBEL PRIZES IN THE WORLD OF BIOLOGICAL "RESEARCH".
AND BELIEVE ME, MY FRIEND, THEY'LL RESEARCH YOU.
THEY'LL CUT YOU OPEN AND TURN YOU INSIDE OUT. THEY'LL PUT YOUR ROTTING FACE ON THE COVER OF EVERY MEDICAL JOURNAL IN THE WORLD.
YOU'LL BE THE "FREAK ILLUSTRATED" CALENDAR BOY. IS THAT WHAT YOU WANT?
I DON'T WANT ANYTHING EXCEPT TO BE NORMAL AGAIN! I WANT TO LIVE LIKE A NORMAL MAN LIVES, IN A HOUSE, WITH A WIFE AND KIDS AND A DOG.
I WANT TO SLEEP IN A NORMAL BED AND DREAM THE THINGS NORMAL PEOPLE DREAM!
I WANT TO GET UP IN THE MORNING AND GO TO MY NORMAL JOB AND HATE IT, LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE!
AND WHEN I COME HOME AT NIGHT, I WANT TO BE ABLE TO LOOK IN THE MIRROR AND SEE MY NORMAL FACE AND SAY, "YEAH, I'M JUST A NORMAL GUY!"

I DON'T WANT TO HIDE IN SWAMPS AND SLEEP IN GRAVEYARDS. I DON'T WANT TO LOOK LIKE YOU.
NO, DAMIEN, AND NEITHER DO I. BUT YOU MUST UNDERSTAND, YOU WERE NEVER NORMAL TO START WITH. THEY MADE YOU, AND YOU CAN'T CHANGE THAT FACT.
YOUR ONLY MISTAKE WAS NOT DYING WHEN YOU HAD THE CHANCE.
THE PAIN... JESUS, CRASSUS, IT'S EATING ME ALIVE FROM THE INSIDE OUT.
YOU ARE BEING REBORN, DAMIEN. EVERY HOUR, EVERY MINUTE. AND BIRTH IS ALWAYS PAINFUL.
THOSE MORONS BACK AT THE BASE DON'T UNDERSTAND. THEY THINK YOU'RE DYING.
I AM DYING, DAMMIT. MANGUY UNDERSTANDS. HE CAN SAVE ME. I ONLY RAN BECAUSE I WAS AFRAID. NOW I'M PETRIFIED. I WANT TO GO BACK, CRASSUS. PLEASE... I WANT TO GO BACK.
IT'S TOO LATE FOR THAT. WE MUST FIND ARCANE. WE MUST HELP EACH OTHER.
TRUST ME, MY FRIEND. TRUST ME.

KNOCK KNOCK
ANYBODY HOME?
OF COURSE. HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN? I'M GROUNDED.
TAKE IT EASY, DAVID. THAT STUFF'S PURE POISON. YOU DON'T WANT TO DO THIS TO YOURSELF.
IT'S ENOUGH TO DRIVE A MAN TO DRINK, I'LL TELL YOU THAT MUCH!
JOIN ME?
AU CONTRAIRE THIS IS PRECISELY WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED.
YOU KNOW, HUTCH, WE TAKE IT FOR GRANTED THAT WHEN WE LOOK IN THE MIRROR, WE'LL LOOK EXACTLY LIKE WE DID THE LAST TIME. AN EXTRA WRINKLE HERE AND THERE, BUT BASICALLY THE SAME.
I ONLY HOPE THAT THERE ARE NO MIRRORS IN DAMIEN'S FUTURE.
IS IT POSSIBLE TO AVOID MIRRORS, HUTCH? TO LIVE A LIFETIME WITHOUT EVER SEEING YOUR REFLECTION?
GO TO BED, DAVID. THIS WON'T HELP ANYTHING.
TO NEVER KNOW WHY PEOPLE CRINGE AND TURN AWAY AS THEY WALK BY?

A MONSTER, THAT'S WHAT HE'LL BECOME. AND I'M RESPONSIBLE.
YOU'RE TALKING NONSENSE. SLEEP IT OFF, DAVID.

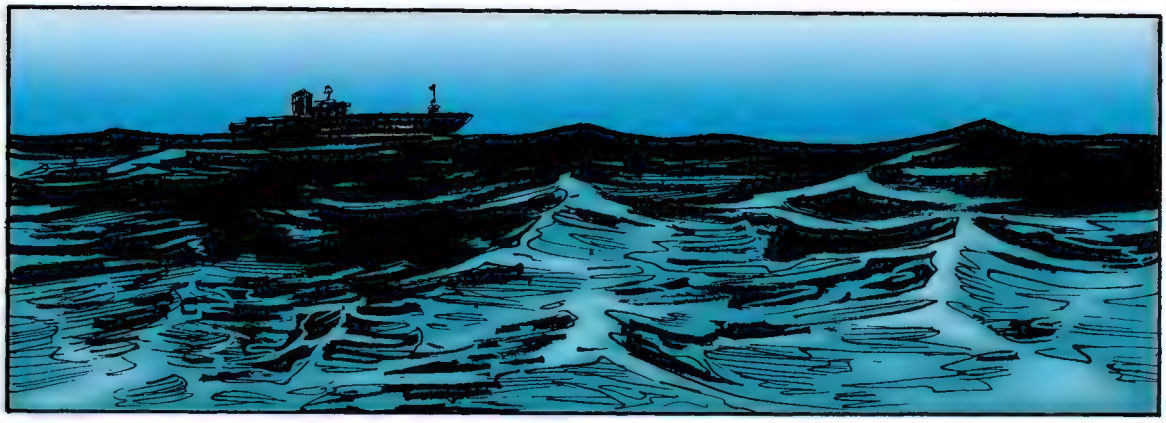
THEY WON'T LET ME LEAVE THE BASE. THEY WON'T LET ME HELP HIM.
HE'LL DIE OUT THERE!
THEY'LL FIND HIM, DON'T WORRY. LAWRENCE IS SENDING ANOTHER TEAM OUT AT FIRST LIGHT.

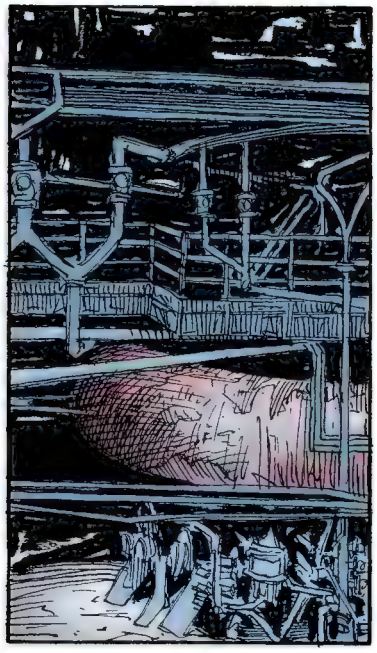
AND WHEN THEY DO FIND HIM, THEY'LL BRING HIM BACK, AND YOU'LL HELP HIM.
BUT YOU'RE NOT GOING TO HELP ANYONE WITH A MASSIVE HANGOVER, SO KNOCK OFF THE BOOZE!

ALL I'VE EVER WANTED TO DO IS HELP PEOPLE. TRY TO EASE THEIR SUFFERING, NOT CREATE IT.
I MUST HAVE HAD MY FINGERS CROSSED WHEN I TOOK THE HIPPOCRATIC OATH.

DO ME A FAVOR, DAVID. SHUT UP AND GO TO SLEEP. DAMIEN CAN TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF FOR NOW. IT'S YOU I'M WORRIED ABOUT.
WHY DID HE RUN? WHERE DID HE THINK HE WAS GOING?

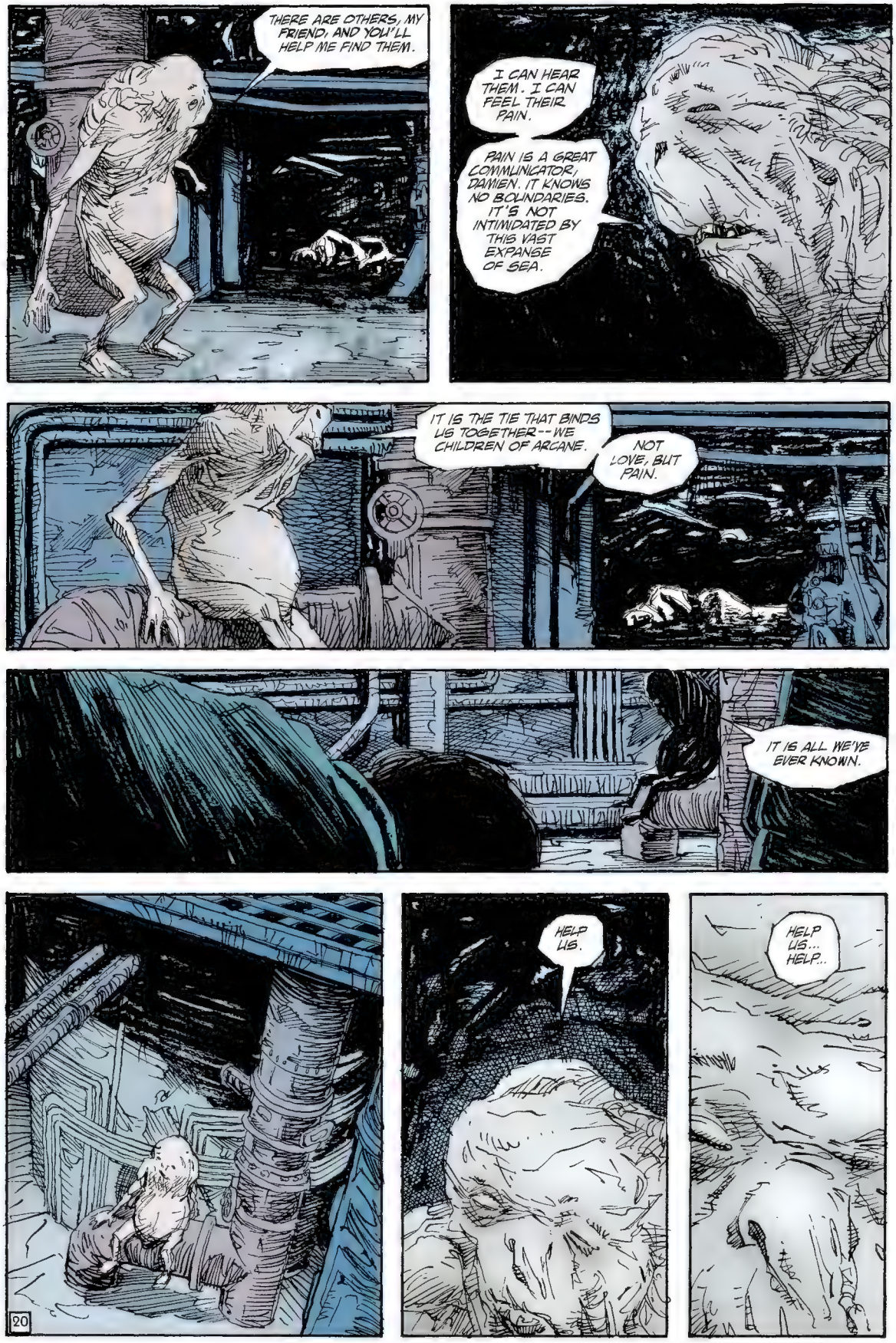
WE'LL TALK IN THE MORNING. IF YOU NEED ANYTHING, GIVE ME A CALL. GOOD NIGHT.





DON'T WORRY, DAMIEN. YOU'RE ONE OF US, NOW.

AND WE TAKE CARE OF OUR OWN.


THERE ARE OTHERS, MY FRIEND, AND YOU'LL HELP ME FIND THEM.
I CAN HEAR THEM. I CAN FEEL THEIR PAIN.
PAIN IS A GREAT COMMUNICATOR, DAMIEN. IT KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES. IT'S NOT INTIMIDATED BY THIS VAST EXPANSE OF SEA.
IT IS THE TIE THAT BINDS US TOGETHER--WE CHILDREN OF ARCANE.
NOT LOVE, BUT PAIN.
IT IS ALL WE'VE EVER KNOWN.
HELP US.
HELP US... HELP..

MORE CHAMPAGNE?

MORE CAVIAR?

GOGOL, YOU MADMAN. WHERE DO YOU FIND THESE ...THESE THINGS?

SUCH UGLINESS! SUCH DEFORMATION... IT'S ALL SO TRAGICALLY... DIVINE!

I AM PLEASED THAT YOU FIND MY LITTLE ...PETS SO INTERESTING. MANY OF THEM WERE QUITE EXPENSIVE.

WHICH IS WHY YOU WILL FORGIVE ME, PLEASE, FOR RAISING THE PRICE OF ADMISSION THIS YEAR.

PRICE IS NO OBJECT, ALEXIEV. FIVE THOUSAND, TEN THOUSAND... YOU CAN'T PUT A PRICE ON THE GLORY OF HUMAN SUFFERING.

EVEN IF YOUR PETS AREN'T ALTOGETHER HUMAN.

I FOUND THIS ONE IN NAPLES TWO YEARS AGO. HIS NAME IS ABEL.

SAY HELLO, ABEL.

HELLO.

A WITTY DEVIL, NO?

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BUT THE NIGHT IS YOUNG, MY FRIENDS, AND THERE IS MUCH MORE TO SEE.

MY HUSBAND IS RIGHT, ALEXIEV. YOU REALLY ARE A MADMAN.

I WILL TAKE THAT AS A COMPLIMENT. BUT THERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MYSELF AND A MADMAN.

I AM NOT MAD.

I'VE NAMED THESE TWO ADAM AND EVE -- THE MOTHER AND FATHER OF ALL FREAKS.

I'VE TRIED TO GET THEM TO MATE, BUT THE MAN, HE HOW SHALL I SAY? WELL, HE JUST *CANNOT*. YOU SEE, ADAM IS NOT *NORMAL*, EVEN FOR A FREAK.

THESE PETS OF MINE ARE EACH SPECIALISTS IN THEIR OWN RIGHT. THEY SPECIALIZE IN MAKING PEOPLE STARE...

...WITHOUT ACTUALLY DOING ANYTHING.

SOME WOULD SAY THAT A GRUESOMELY DEFORMED WOMAN INSPIRES THE SAME URGE TO STARE AS A TRULY BEAUTIFUL WOMAN DOES.

TO ME, HOWEVER, THESE HORRIBLE CREATURES NO MORE BELONG IN THE SAME ROOM WITH PEOPLE LIKE US THAN MICHELANGELO'S DAVID BELONGED IN THE CAVE WITH THE GORGON, MEDUSA.

BUT THIS, MY FRIENDS, IS A LIVING MUSEUM OF UGLINESS, WHERE NATURE'S MONSTERS ARE JUDGED LIKE SINNERS OF ANOTHER SPECIES.

IT'S JUST LIKE ART.

EXACTLY.

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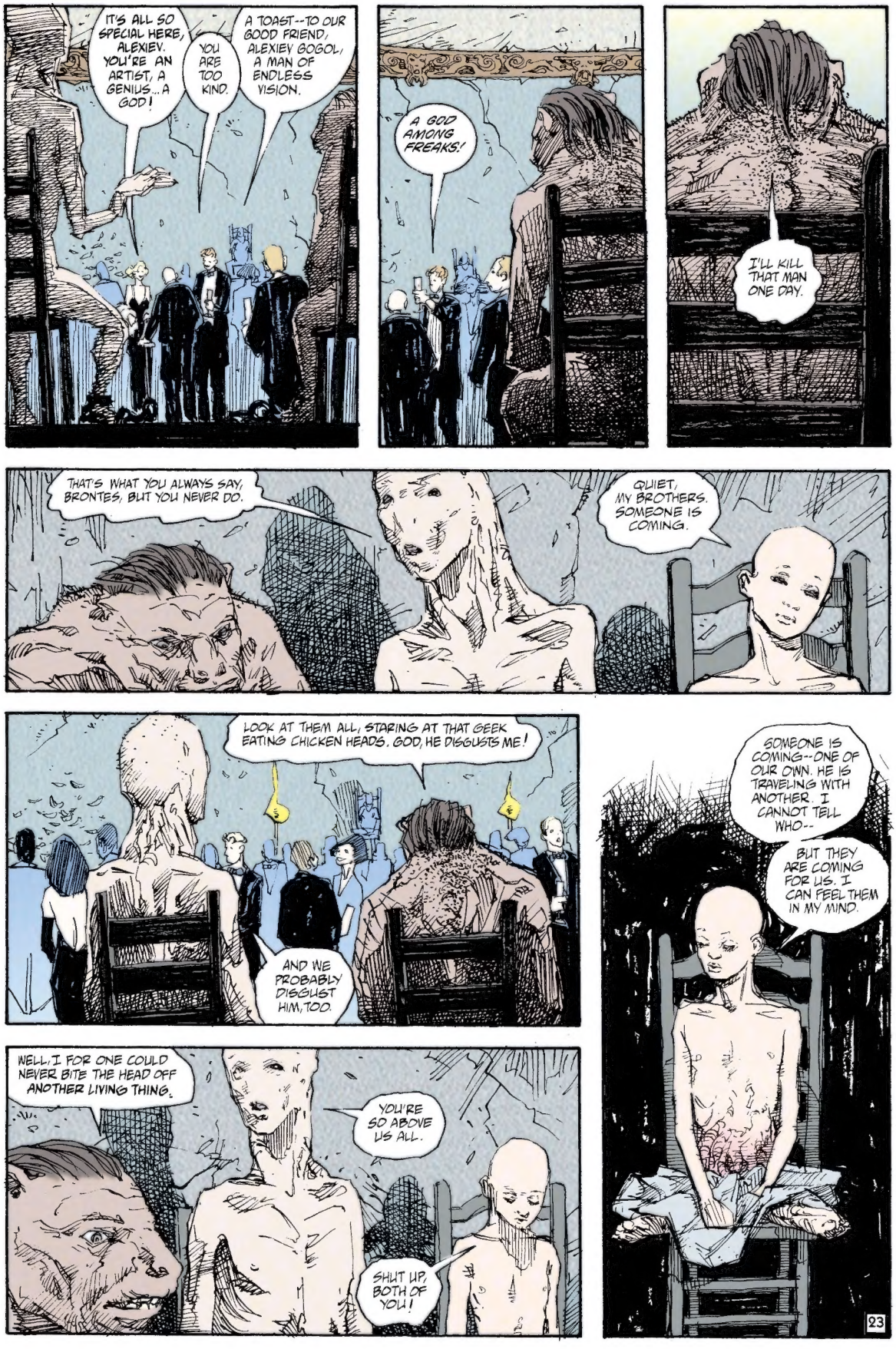
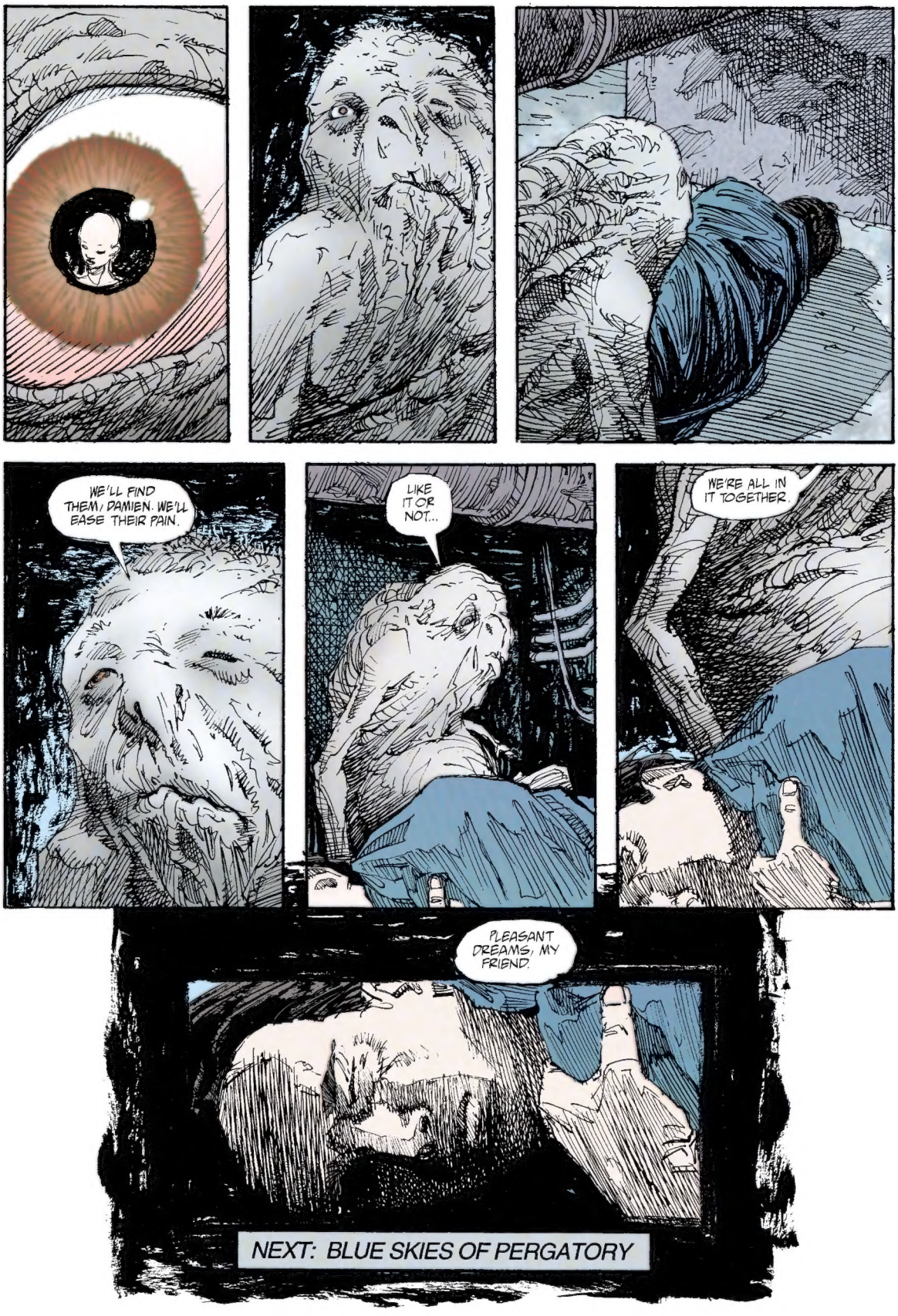
THIS ONE IS A BIT OF A BORE; I'M AFRAID, AS HE SIMPLY DOES DISGUSTING THINGS. THERE'S NOTHING PHYSICALLY SPECIAL ABOUT HIM.

BUT THERE IS SOMETHING AESTHETICALLY SATISFYING IN WATCHING A MAN BITE THE HEAD OFF A LIVE BIRD, WHILE YOU DINE ON CAVIAR.

SPLENDID, GOGOL. YOU'VE DONE IT AGAIN!


IT'S ALL SO SPECIAL HERE, ALEXIEV. YOU'RE AN ARTIST, A GENIUS... A GOD!
YOU ARE TOO KIND.
A TOAST--TO OUR GOOD FRIEND, ALEXIEV GOGOL, A MAN OF ENDLESS VISION.
A GOD AMONG FREAKS!
I'LL KILL THAT MAN ONE DAY.
THAT'S WHAT YOU ALWAYS SAY, BRONTES, BUT YOU NEVER DO.
QUIET, MY BROTHERS. SOMEONE IS COMING.
LOOK AT THEM ALL, STARING AT THAT GEEK EATING CHICKEN HEADS. GOD, HE DISGUSTS ME!
AND WE PROBABLY DISGUST HIM, TOO.
SOMEONE IS COMING--ONE OF OUR OWN. HE IS TRAVELING WITH ANOTHER. I CANNOT TELL WHO--
BUT THEY ARE COMING FOR US. I CAN FEEL THEM IN MY MIND.
WELL, I FOR ONE COULD NEVER BITE THE HEAD OFF ANOTHER LIVING THING.
YOU'RE SO ABOVE US ALL.
SHUT UP, BOTH OF YOU!


WE'LL FIND THEM, DAMIEN. WE'LL EASE THEIR PAIN.
LIKE IT OR NOT...
WE'RE ALL IN IT TOGETHER.
PLEASANT DREAMS, MY FRIEND.
NEXT: BLUE SKIES OF PERGATORY